LIVING IN THE POST-TRUTH WORLD: RECENT RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

A LIA Research Advisory Committee member, NICOLE JOHNSTON, reports on the issue of blindly trusting what we see and hear in the post-truth era.

With the recent elections in the United States and Europe, there has been an intensified interest in fake news and the role it plays in influencing society. The Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 was 'post-truth', which is defined as: relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. In the United States, research by The PEW Research Center[1] has shown that although television is still the most popular way to receive news, many people now get their news from social media sources with family and friends another important way. However, people often get this news within a filter bubble or echo chamber where their own views and beliefs are reflected in the news feeds they receive.

Recent research by the Stanford History Education Group[2] into how students evaluate information found that, in general, school students across different school levels did not effectively evaluate information on the internet. The project conducted, which studied how school students in Los Angeles schools evaluated information on the internet, found that, when it came to evaluating the trustworthiness of images on a photo sharing website, nearly 40% of high school students argued that the post provided strong evidence because it presented pictorial evidence. The research also found that students did not evaluate the image based on considerations such as the source of the photo. The group also found that more than 80% of middle school students believed that a native advertisement, identified by the words 'sponsored content', was a real news story and that undergraduate students did not consider bias as a consideration when it came to the author of tweets. This study shows that in general, students often trust information from social media sites and do not effectively evaluate information from social media. In the United Kingdom, The Telegraph[3] reported on a NASUWT poll of teachers that found that 34% of the teachers surveyed said that students had cited fake sources of information in their homework and assignments.

On the other hand, a study in Australia has found that students are still cautious about the information they read online. An Australian national digital participation survey by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner & Department of Education and Training[4] of 2,448 young people aged 12 to 17 found that participants were spending big chunks of their time online but were still cautious when it comes to believing what they read or saw. The report found that when comparing trusted information sources, television is more trusted than online sources with 61% of young people trusting television, 51% trusting online sources, 40% internet searches, 32% social media posts by friends and 20% social media posts by others. Although the survey found more youth trusted television, the fact that online and social media

are still automatically trusted by at least half of the youth in the study shows that many school students are not effectively evaluating social media and online sources.

Librarians can play a critical role in developing essential digital literacy and critical thinking skills that will enable students and the public to spot fake news and effectively evaluate information they get online or through friends and family. There are several organisations that have published guides on how to spot fake news including the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) guide to spotting fake news that has eight simple steps (bit.ly/2uVAfZc).

There are also many useful free resources that have been created on news literacy, including resources such as a news literacy program developed by librarians for primary school students which can be found in the *School Library Journal*[5] and a blog by a librarian that lists lots of useful resources to help students spot fake news (bit.ly/2nMOEC2). ⚙

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